



FORMAT FOR
PRINTING
sponsored by



November 30, 2005


REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Oil for Friends

November 30, 2005; Page A18

Money can't buy love, unless you're Anna Nicole Smith. But these days a little heating oil can buy friends in Washington, especially when they come as cheap as Democrat William Delahunt. Massachusetts wants bargain oil prices to help it through the winter. Venezuelan tyrant Hugo Chávez wants influence in Washington. Leave it to the Congressman from the Commonwealth and a Kennedy to close the deal.

DOW JONES REPRINTS

 This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit: www.djreprints.com.

- [See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)
- [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

Last week Venezuela announced that its U.S.-based Citgo Petroleum would sell 12 million gallons of home heating oil at a 40% discount to help the poor in Massachusetts. The deal was announced by Mr. Delahunt on the lawn of a beneficiary before Thanksgiving, with Congressman Ed Markey at his side. "This today is about people, it's not about politics," Mr. Delahunt said with a straight face. Massachusetts-based Citizens Energy, run by the Kennedy clan, will be one of the distributors.

"To Citgo, to the people of Venezuela, our debt," the Congressman pledged. Mr. Delahunt should rightly feel a debt to the people of Venezuela, whose per-capita income is perhaps one-tenth that of Massachusetts and whose sole source of hard currency is the oil that their leader is now giving away to the second-richest state in the union. But Mr. Delahunt has no unpaid debt to Mr. Chávez. For some years now the Congressman has been lobbying hard for the Venezuelan despot, whom he paints as a misunderstood humanitarian. How French.

Mr. Chávez came to power in 1999. In seven years he has a domestic record of human rights abuses, election fraud, property confiscations à la Zimbabwe's Mugabe, erosion of the independent judiciary, limits on press freedom and militarization. His best friends include Fidel Castro, the Iranian mullahs and Colombia's FARC terrorists.

The Bush Administration is worried about all this, but Mr. Delahunt has no qualms. After Mr. Chávez was briefly deposed in 2002 because of his use of violence against dissent, Mr. Delahunt visited Venezuela and proclaimed, "I think he's learned from this. I think he understands that healing and reconciliation are the true qualities of leadership, not division." Mr. Chávez's attacks on his critics have since worsened.

Mr. Delahunt returned to Caracas to dine with Mr. Chávez in August and was asked whether he might be acting in opposition to U.S. policy. "I don't work for Condoleezza Rice. I don't report to the State Department. I report to the people who elected me in the state of Massachusetts. I belong to an independent branch of government."

Which would be more accurate if it were possible for Massachusetts to have a separate foreign policy. Mr. Delahunt's lobbying for the dictator undermines any official U.S. pressure on Mr. Chávez to behave more humanely, which is precisely why Mr. Chávez is returning the favor by plying Mr. Delahunt with cheap oil.

For less pliable Americans, el jefe del Caracas has a different policy. On Monday, a U.S. Congressional delegation led by House International Relations Chairman Henry Hyde and ranking Democrat Tom Lantos was barred from entering the country and held aboard their aircraft for two hours. The delegation's itinerary had been known to Venezuelan officials for weeks. For a little more discount oil, perhaps Mr. Delahunt will explain to his colleagues how this was all just one big misunderstanding.

URL for this article:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB113331806576009826.html>

Copyright 2005 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our **Subscriber Agreement** and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.